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Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism

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Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism. Edited by JOSEPH M. ORTIZ. Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. xii + 294. \$119.95 cloth.

Reviewed by DANIEL COOK

Romantic Shakespeare has garnered a lot of critical attention in recent years, following the lead of Jonathan Bate in such studies as *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (1986), *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730–1830* (1989), and *The Genius of Shakespeare* (1997). Since then, scholars have found much joy in tracing the Bard's influence on relatively recent additions to the canon of leading Romantic poets, such as Mary Robinson and John Clare, as well as on well-worn favorites, particularly Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats. Researchers working on the long eighteenth century more broadly, however, have tended to look not at the creative appropriation of the works but at the mutability of the Shakespearean text in a century that saw the appearance of a handful of key editions. The 1990s and early 2000s proved to be a notably fecund period for scholars interested in the various ways in which Shakespeare was edited, remediated, and performed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the varied and important studies produced during that time include the work of Michael Dobson, Simon Jarvis, Jean Marsden, Jack Lynch, Marcus Walsh, Margreta de Grazia, and Nigel Cliff. Such studies, to which we can add Joseph M. Ortiz's essay collection *Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism*, open out Bate's treatment of Shakespeare's looming presence in English Romantic poetry. While Ortiz's collection largely remains in familiar Romanticist territory—with the softest of gestures toward the textual work of Malone and earlier figures, for example—much new work explored here usefully puts the poets back into dialogue with the playwrights, editors, actors, and other members of the literary marketplace.

The collection comprises twelve chapters in four distinct, if overlapping, sections: "Rethinking the Romantic Critic"; "Shakespeare and the Making of the Romantic Poet"; "The Romantic Stage"; and "Harnessing the Renaissance: Markets, Religion, Politics." The contributors attend to some prominent figures, including Wordsworth and Coleridge, but often consider neglected or surprising new areas. Joanna Baillie's *The Martyr* (1826) and *The Bride* (1828) provide coauthors Marjean D. Purinton and Marliiss C. Desens ample points of connection with *Pericles*, a play written at least in part by Shakespeare and often included in modern editions of his works. *Zapolya* (1817), while not an unknown work, is rarely discussed these days even though Coleridge wrote the play during a significant period in his career as a writer and theorist, as Paola Degli Esposti reminds us.

The collection as a whole certainly brings to the fore a wealth of new material pertinent to a critical debate that ran throughout the nineteenth century: are Shakespeare's works best appreciated when read as poetry or seen in performance? William Hazlitt took a firm stand against performance. *Hamlet* in particular, he famously argued in *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817), "suffers so much in

being transferred to the stage.”¹ Many of the contributors to the present collection depart from this Hazlittian position. Karen Britland deftly probes the often highly mannered theatricality that congealed around *Hamlet*’s performance history during the nineteenth century. Suddhaseel Sen follows Shakespeare to France in a reading of Ambroise Thomas’s *Hamlet*, which draws on Linda Hutcheon’s scholarship to unpack the politics of translation, the modern debate that pits adaptation against appropriation, and the complicating dynamics of music in operatic reworkings.

Hazlitt naturally takes a prominent place in Thomas Festa’s discussion of how the mainstream nineteenth-century reception of Shakespeare augured “an ‘authorizing’ . . . condition of Wordsworth’s poetic imagination” (79). But David Chandler makes a strong case for considering other critical voices of the period, notably Walter Savage Landor, whose *Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare* (1834) famously figures the historical Shakespeare as a mischievous actor. Karen Bloom Gevirtz similarly outlines Elizabeth Inchbald’s importance as a Shakespeare critic, not least of all because Inchbald was a noted playwright and actress in her own right. Other contributors explore Shakespeare’s influence on major poets who have only recently gained a prominent place in the Romantic canon, such as Charlotte Smith. In a reading evocative of T. S. Eliot, Joy Currie considers Smith’s appropriations of Shakespeare verse in which we see the maturing writer learning to adapt in an increasingly sophisticated way the context, as well as the language, of her borrowings.

Some subjects might seem out of keeping with the scope of a book of this kind, not least of all Emily Dickinson. Marianne Noble nevertheless finds much to ponder in the early, Romantic Dickinson. Leigh Wetherall-Dickson, too, usefully extends the reach of the collection to include Byron’s erstwhile love, Lady Caroline Lamb, and John Ford, a fairly obscure seventeenth-century political playwright. Francesca Saggini’s important new essay on the Gothic staging of Shakespeare looks at the dramatic works of James Boaden, better known as one of the most vociferous expositors of William Henry Ireland’s forgeries. Ann R. Hawkins’s bibliographical essay on the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, meanwhile, pointedly demonstrates the importance of recovering collections such as that of John Boydell with its sculpture and paintings illustrating the works of Shakespeare. Objects and ephemera, like performance history, are by definition difficult to trace, but the pursuit of them helps to expand the pluralist “culture of Romanticism” at play here (and in recent scholarship) beyond Shakespeare’s shaping presence in major Romantic poetry alone.

Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism is an important, if often understated, new collection that documents a number of ways in which theater directors, actors, poets, political philosophers, gallery owners, and other professionals in the nineteenth century habitually turned to Shakespeare, as Ortiz puts it, in order “to advance their own political, artistic, or commercial interests” (2). This is not to suggest that Shakespeare proved to be textual fodder prone to opportunistic plunderers. On the contrary, many of the essays here strive to show further and often surprising ways in which men and women working in different fields and with different political persuasions creatively engaged with the Bard long after his death.

¹ William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* (1916; repr., London: Oxford UP, 1966), 87.